

INTERNATIONAL CIVIL AVIATION ORGANIZATION

FIRST ASSEMBLY

COMMISSION NO. 1 - CONSTITUTIONAL AND GENERAL POLICY QUESTIONS

Agenda Item 9: Languages, interpretation and translation in ICAO

General

1. The language problem in an international organization cannot be underestimated since it relates to the medium through which any business of any nature whatsoever is to be transacted. It is of paramount importance for the smoothness and efficiency of the work, and its satisfactory solution is necessary for the preservation of the truly international character of such an organization. This problem involves political, administrative and financial questions more or less conflicting with one another, and a compromise has to be found in each case.

2. Many States belonging to an international organization may wish to have as many national languages as possible used in the organization. This desire is not always dictated by considerations of prestige, but may be based on reasons of convenience and economy. It may be extremely difficult for a State to find individuals to represent it at meetings of the organization who are experts in the subjects to be discussed and, at the same time, able to speak, read and even write in a foreign language. It may be equally difficult to find within national administrations individuals similarly qualified, so that complete attention may be given to the work of the Organization. In any case, the fact that the organization makes use of a particular language implies expenditure - for States not using that language - to translate the regulations issued by it into the national language, with a view to including these regulations in the national law. In view of the enormous volume of regulatory material emanating from ICAO, Member States will be put to very considerable expense if they are obliged to produce their own translations. A satisfactory solution of the language problem should result in a saving for a number of States and facilitate the participation of their experts and representatives in the work of the Organization. On the other hand, it is obvious that the number of languages which can be used without overburdening an international organization or impairing its efficiency is limited.

Practical aspects of the problem

3. The language problem transcends any mere question of form; it influences every aspect of the substance of discussions or agreements and the speed and adequacy with which such agreements are reached.

4. It may be argued that the use of several languages for the conduct of meetings results in increasing the length of proceedings unless simultaneous interpretation with the help of telephonic equipment is made available. However, the time and effort devoted to consecutive interpretation do not necessarily mean delay in the completion of work, since misunderstandings are apt to cause far more delay than the proper recognition of difficulties involved in enabling delegates to participate fully in the discussions. In addition, any time lost on account of interpretation during a meeting is to some extent offset by the advantages of using the pause for reflection.

5. Any text requiring implementation must of necessity be issued in languages which are widely understood, before its use can be inaugurated. The existence of official texts in more than one language helps to eliminate ambiguity, since reference to an edition in another language will, in most instances, elucidate its actual meaning. The constant preoccupation with rendering into another language will generally eliminate any loose phrasing in the preparation of final texts, since translation of a text provides a test of its clarity.

6. The solution of the language problem in an international organization necessarily involves considerable expenditure for the Secretariat. This expenditure increases with the number of languages used by the organization. In addition, the use of several languages in the documents and publications of an organization may result in considerable delay in their issuance if all language editions must appear simultaneously. It may also happen that the number of documents and publications is so great that they cannot be translated in time by the existing services of the Secretariat, which may in turn produce an accumulation of untranslated documents and publications, as has been the experience in PICA0.

Practice followed by other international organizations

7. The difficulties previously mentioned have led other international organizations to reduce as far as possible the number of languages used by them. Whenever political considerations have obliged them to adopt more than two languages, they have restricted the practical utilization thereof to not more than two languages for their internal work.⁽¹⁾ The solution of the language problem appears to have been found generally in the adoption of a distinction between "official" and "working" languages.

Proposed definitions of official and working languages

8. Subject to specific exceptions which may be decreed by the organization itself, especially in connection with regional activities:

(1) The actual practice followed by the main international organizations is described in Appendix-A.

- (a) An official language may be defined as a language selected, on political or other grounds, by an international organization for use in:
- final texts calling for implementation by Member States,
 - speeches and statements made by representatives of States without entailing for them any obligation to supply their own interpretation.
- (b) A working language may be defined as a language selected on practical grounds by the organization from among its official languages for use in:
- every document or publication issued or produced by the organization,
 - interpretation of any speech or statement made in any other official or working language.

Practice in PICA0

9. Absence of regulatory procedure - In PICA0 there has been no definite designation of certain languages as "official" or "working". Empirically, the Organization has assumed that the three languages in which authentic texts of the Interim Agreement and Convention were to be produced were the languages of the Organization. The Council therefore adopted a policy calling for the issuance of all documents and publications in English, French and Spanish. By the end of the interim period this had resulted in the accumulation of such a backlog of untranslated material that the Council, much against its wish, was obliged to draw a distinction between these three languages and to authorize the Secretariat not to proceed any longer with the translation into French and Spanish of supporting papers and minutes of past Divisional meetings. The use of three working languages having proved impracticable during the first session of the Council, English became, to all intents and purposes, the only language employed at meetings of the Council and its various working groups.

10. Interpretation - Discussions in the Interim Council and its Committees have been conducted almost entirely in English, with occasional interventions in French or Spanish when certain members found it impossible to express themselves in English. This practice was followed as a temporary expedient and was possible only through the goodwill and co-operation of Council and Committee members. Not infrequently, however, it resulted in certain members limiting their statements because of the difficulty of expressing themselves in a language with which

they felt insufficiently conversant. French and Spanish have been used to a somewhat greater extent in Division meetings, although 85% of their discussions have been conducted in English. Facilities for interpretation into French and, in some instances, Spanish have been provided at most plenary meetings of Divisions lately and in the meetings of their subcommittees when specifically requested by delegates.

11. Correspondence - Outgoing correspondence has in every instance been sent in English, French or Spanish, according to the wishes of the State to which it was addressed. Incoming correspondence in English has never been translated into French or Spanish, while incoming correspondence in other languages has, in every instance, been translated into English.

12. Internal secretarial documents (such as office instructions, administrative procedures, distribution of duties) and most Council documents, as well as documents of the Committees of the Council have been written exclusively in English.

13. Final documents - calling for action on the part of Member States, and publications have mostly been translated into French and Spanish, the original working text being, in all instances, written in English.

14. Other documents - such as agendas, supporting papers, minutes of meetings, documentation in connection with various national regulations or practices **were translated into French** and Spanish only insofar as it was possible to comply with the demands for translation. On the other hand, they have always been made available in English, if the original is in some other language.

Policy to be followed in ICAO

15. It is very important that a definite policy should be adopted for ICAO, and the following alternatives are submitted for the consideration of the Assembly:

- (a) the use of a single working language, as is the practice of the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development;
- (b) the use of two working languages in which every document will be issued. (Whether internal secretarial documents and Council documents should also be issued in both working languages is a point which should be left to the decision of the Council). Use of two working languages would conform to the policy adopted by the United Nations and would offer the advantage of uniformity in the

event of ICAO entering into a final agreement with the United Nations defining the relationships of the two bodies;

- (c) the use of three working languages. In this case the burden of translation would be very considerable and the situation might develop where, in actual practice, one working language only would be used, as has been the experience of PICA0.

If any one of the above alternatives were adopted, the number of official languages would have to be determined. The Council should also be given some discretion to deviate from the policy adopted by the Assembly if the necessity should arise.

Translation

16. Whatever solution is adopted, the Assembly may also wish to consider whether all the documents of the Organization should be produced in all of the working languages, or whether a selection should be made between various types of documents with a view to limiting translations to absolutely indispensable material. In this connection, the Interim Council recently decided to limit production in French and Spanish during the remainder of the interim period to the following :

- (1) Outgoing State letters, general correspondence, and current information sent by Contracting State (e.g. NOTAMS);
- (2) Official acts of the Organization and official texts (e.g. Recommendations for Standards, Practices and Procedures) calling for implementation by the Contracting States;
- (3) Agendas;
- (4) Main supporting papers for the Assembly (including the Report from the Council), for the Divisional meetings and for the regional or special meetings;
- (5) Final reports of Divisional, regional and special meetings; reports from the statutory Committees (Air Navigation, Air Transport, International Air Law) to the Council;
- (6) Manuals;
- (7) Procedures for Air Navigation Services, NOTAM PANS and the Supplements to the Procedures;
- (8) The Publications (ICAO Monthly Bulletin, ICAO Circulars, Proceedings).

17. It is estimated that the above list will involve translation of 5,000,000 words into every one of the working languages for the year 1947-48. This estimate, however, is based upon the activity of the Organization in the past and does not take into account any possible expansion of such activity in the future.

Interpretation

18. As regards interpretation, the use of a simultaneous telephonic system would make interpretation possible into or from all official languages, if their number is limited to three. Simultaneous interpretation into more than three working languages would involve expenditure and difficulties out of proportion with the size of the Organization. Unless the telephonic system can be used, it would not be practicable to make use of more than two working languages, each one requiring consecutive interpretation into the other.

Implementation

19. The financial implications of the decision to be made by the Assembly are set forth in the supporting documentation for the budget (DOC. 4058 A1-AD/12).

20. The suggestion has been made that the Assembly, when apportioning the expenses of the Organization among Contracting States, might take into account the cost of translations necessary for implementing the Standards, Practices and Procedures when such work has to be done nationally. The Interim Council has taken no position on the matter, but the Assembly may wish to consider the possibility.

Conclusion

21. The following points would appear to require Assembly decision :

- (a) How are "official" and "working" languages to be defined?
- (b) What official languages should be adopted by the Organization?
- (c) What should be the working language or languages of the Organization?

The views of the Assembly would also be helpful to the Council in determining :

- (d) Which documents should be produced in the working languages and which should be translated into the official languages?

- (e) What should the policy be concerning the technical aspects of interpretation, i.e. what relation should exist between the method of interpretation used (simultaneous or consecutive) and the number of working languages?
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APPENDIX A

PRACTICE OF OTHER INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS

I - The United Nations

1. The following rules of procedure concerning languages were adopted by the General Assembly at its first session. Although the rules themselves remain unchanged, a de facto modification has been made in paragraphs 3 and 4 as a result of the introduction of facilities for simultaneous interpretation which enable the Secretariat to provide interpretation from and into the five official languages of the Organization.

"Rules of Procedure Concerning Languages

Resolved that the General Assembly:

- (a) adopts rules of procedure concerning languages in conformity with the rules herewith presented (annex);
- (b) recommends to the other organs of the United Nations the adoption of language rules in conformity with the rules herewith presented;
- (c) recommends that the Secretary-General make a thorough enquiry into the question of the installation of telephonic systems of interpretation and, if possible, arrange for the establishment of such a system for the second part of the first session.

Twenty-first plenary meeting, 1 February 1946.

ANNEX

1. In all the organs of the United Nations, other than the International Court of Justice, Chinese, French, English, Russian and Spanish shall be the official languages, and English and French the working languages.
2. Speeches made in either of the working languages shall be interpreted into the other working languages.
3. Speeches made in any of the other three official languages shall be interpreted into both working languages.
4. Any representative may make a speech in a language other than the official languages. In this case he shall himself provide for interpretation into one of the working languages. Interpretation into the other working language by an interpreter of the Secretariat may be based on the interpretation given in the first working language.

5. Verbatim records shall be drawn up in the working languages. A translation of the whole or part of any verbatim record into any of the other official languages shall be furnished if requested by any delegation.

6. Summary records shall be drawn up as soon as possible in the official languages.

7. The "Journals" of the organs of the United Nations shall be issued in the working languages.

8. All resolutions and other important documents shall be made available in the official languages. Upon the request of any representative, any other document shall be made available in any or all of the official languages.

9. Documents of the organs of the United Nations shall, if those organs so decide, be published in any languages other than the official languages."

2. The practice of the United Nations as regards translation is as follows :

(a) State Letters and General Correspondence

The Language Division of the United Nations is required to translate incoming correspondence into one of the working languages, French or English. In actual practice, most of the correspondence in languages other than French is translated into English. Incoming correspondence in French is not translated:

Outgoing correspondence follows no set pattern. The bulk of it is written either in French or in English, including letters for South American countries, China and Russia. Outgoing correspondence is not generally routed through the Language Division but is produced directly by the Division concerned. If the latter has a member capable of writing in Chinese, Russian or Spanish, this individual writes letters addressed to Chinese, Russian or Spanish speaking countries in one of these languages, as found appropriate and convenient.

(b) Documents

All documents, in whatever category, are produced in both working languages, e.g. English and French. Regulations provide that only important documents shall be translated into the other official languages of the Organization, e.g. Russian, Chinese and Spanish. Choice of these important documents is not left to the judgment of various executives but is specifically defined by special regulations. They include official acts of the Organization, resolutions, decisions and, in general, all documents which present a character of authenticity.

Since the highest proportion of United Nations documents are written originally in English, translation into French accounts for the greatest translation volume for any one language. The average daily workload is estimated at 60,000 words into French and 21,000 words into English. Of the foregoing it is estimated that the important documents "required" to be translated into Russian, Chinese and Spanish represent about 7,500 words per day or approximately 10% of the total wordage of the United Nations.

In practice, the volume of translation into the other languages has been about as follows:

Russian - 19,500 words per day
 Spanish - 7,500 words per day
 Chinese - 6,000 words per day

This would indicate that the demand for translation into Russian goes beyond the so-called "important" documents which it has been decided by statute to translate, the excess representing miscellaneous papers requested by delegates. The translation into Spanish appears to be in the quantity laid down by statute and into Chinese somewhat less.

With translation into French representing a principal demand in both the United Nations and PICA0, output in this language offers a convenient yardstick by which to compare the relative efficiency of the language sections of the two organizations. The French staff of the United Nations, it is understood, consists of 50 translators and 10 revisers. The daily production of the two organizations, on the basis of available information, is estimated at

	<u>Translators</u>	<u>Revisors</u>
United Nations	1200 words	6000 words
PICA0	1114 words	6759 words

It would be noted, however, that in the United Nations the overwhelming majority of the texts deal with political, economic and other general subjects, whereas PICA0 translations involve difficult terms and necessitate the creation of new technical terminology. In connection with the above figures, the Assembly will be interested to know that in the United Nations the proportion as between translators and revisers is five to one, whereas in PICA0 it is approximately six to one. In the United Nations it is the view of the responsible language heads that the proportion should be three to one as a necessary means of improving the quality of output.

Authorities consulted by the Secretary General have agreed upon the following co-efficients for assessing the manpower and time needed in translating into the languages designated.

From English into French	- 1
From French into English	- 1
From French or English into Spanish	- 1.2
From French or English into Russian	- 1.4
From French or English into Chinese	- 2 plus

It is understood that the goal set at the United Nations for translations from English into French and vice versa is 2400 words per day per man. This is exactly double the present rate. It is not anticipated that this goal can be reached before several years. It was reached in the League of Nations by a handful of old-time translators, a number of whom are revisers in the United Nations. The latter are working on the assumption that it takes three years to form an efficient language section. At the present time, after almost two years of operation, only a few (less than five) of the translators have reached an average of 1800 words.

II - The International Labour Office

3. The following rules of procedure constitute the governing regulations concerning language in the ILO :

"A - Extract from the General Standing Orders

Article 15

Motions, Resolutions and Amendments

3. All resolutions and amendments other than motions as to procedure must be submitted in writing in one of the official languages or in Spanish.

4. (1) No resolution relating to an item on the agenda shall, unless it be a motion as to procedure, be moved at any sitting of the Conference unless a copy has been handed in to the Secretariat of the Conference at least two days previously.

(2) Any resolution thus handed in shall be translated and circulated by the Secretariat not later than the day following that on which it was received.

Article 24

Languages

1. The French and English languages shall be the official languages of the Conference.
2. Speeches in French shall be summarised in English and vice versa by an interpreter belonging to the Secretariat of the Conference.
3. Speeches made in Spanish shall be summarised by the official interpreters who shall also give a summary in Spanish of speeches made in English or French.
4. A delegate may speak in another non-official language but his delegation must provide for a summarised translation of his speech into one of the two official languages by an interpreter attached to the delegation, unless an interpreter of the Conference for the official languages can be placed at its disposal by the Secretariat of the Conference. This summarised translation shall then be rendered in the other official language by an interpreter belonging to the Secretariat.
5. The translation and circulation of documents shall be in the hands of the Secretariat and all such documents shall appear in English, French and Spanish.

Article 50

Languages of Committees

1. The French and English languages shall be the official languages of the committees.
2. Speeches in French shall be summarised in English and vice versa by an interpreter belonging to the Secretariat of the Conference.
3. Speeches made in Spanish shall be summarised by the official interpreters, who shall also give a summary in Spanish of speeches made in English and French.
4. A delegate may speak in another non-official language but his delegation must provide for a summarised translation of his speech into one of the two official languages by an interpreter attached to the delegation, unless an interpreter of the Conference for the official languages can be placed at its disposal by the Secretariat of the Conference. This summarised translation shall then be rendered in the other official language by an interpreter of the Secretariat.

- "5. In cases where at least one fifth of the members of a committee taking an actual part in its work either as regular members or as substitutes declare individually and in writing that it is difficult for them to take part in the proceedings of the committee in either of the official languages or in Spanish and ask for an additional interpretation into another language with which they are conversant, the committee shall accede to that request provided that the Secretariat of the Conference is able to supply the necessary interpreters.
6. In cases where the number of members of a committee who ask for an additional interpretation into a non-official language in the conditions laid down in the above paragraph is less than one fifth of the number of members, the committee shall decide whether it shall accede to the request as an exceptional measure and provided that the Secretariat of the Conference is able to furnish the necessary interpreters.

Article 55

Motions, Resolutions and Amendments

3. All resolutions and amendments other than motions as to procedure must be submitted in writing in one of the official languages or in Spanish.
5. The texts of resolutions and amendments shall be translated and distributed before the discussion to all members of the committee present at the sitting.
6. Only amendments to amendments already submitted under the conditions referred to above may be submitted during a sitting of a committee for discussion at that sitting. Such amendments shall be submitted in writing in one of the official languages or in Spanish.

B - Extract from the Standing Orders of the Governing Body (Adopted by the Governing Body on 23 March 1920. Amended by the Governing Body on 13 October 1922, 2 February, 12 April, 18 October 1923, 13 June 1924, 10 January, 4 April, 15 October 1925, 27 and 28 April 1928, 5 June 1930, 21 and 22 April, 17 October 1931, 6 April, 26 October 1932, 24 January, 27 April, 1 June, 28 September 1934, 2 February, 12 April 1935, 2 June 1936, 5 February 1938).

Article 6

Admission to Meetings

3. Members of the Governing Body who do not speak French or English are authorized to bring into the Governing Body room interpreters to assist them, on their own responsibility and at their own expense.

"C - Extract from the Model Standing Orders for
Conference of Technical Experts

Article 8

Languages

1. The French and English languages shall be the official languages of conferences of technical experts.

2. The International Labour Office shall make such arrangements for the interpretation of speeches and translation of documents in other languages as are necessary to meet the convenience of delegates and practicable with the facilities and staff available."

4. In the International Labour Office there is a degree of decentralization of translation work to the sections, the experts being required to give substantial assistance to the central translation staff. As with PICAQ, a large number of the documents are not translated from the language in which they are originally written, normally English or French. The practice has been to produce the more permanent and important documents in English, French and Spanish. The language problem is not, however, strictly comparable to that of this Organization, since the vocabulary employed is very largely non-technical.

III - United Nations Educational, Scientific
and Cultural Organization (UNESCO)

5. The following rules of procedure governing languages have been provisionally adopted by UNESCO for its general conference. No information is available upon the current practices of this Organization in the language field.

"Rule 33 - a) The official languages of the General Conference are English, French, Russian, Spanish and Chinese.

b) English and French shall be the working languages of the General Conference.

At the meetings of the Conference and its commissions, speeches shall be interpreted from English into French and from French into English. In these meetings delegates may also speak in any other language, but they must themselves provide for interpretation of their speech into either English or French, according to their choice; the Secretariat shall provide for interpretation in the other language.

All documents, verbatim records, etc., of the

- c) Any amendment to the text of the Constitution, and any decision of the Conference regarding the Constitution and the legal status of UNESCO shall be translated into English, French, Russian, Spanish and Chinese.

At the request of any Delegation, any other document may be translated into any one, or into all five, of the above-mentioned languages. The interested Delegation shall provide the staff of translators and precis writers if the occasion arises."

IV - International Bank and Monetary Fund

6. It is understood that the International Bank and the International Monetary Fund have adopted English as the only official language for both speeches and publications and documents, but translation of documents into other languages may be arranged on request.

V - Food and Agriculture Organization

7. The Food and Agriculture Organization makes use of two official languages - English and French. Speeches and documents are produced in both of these languages. Spanish is used as an auxiliary language.

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